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SENATOR JACKSON

/ News

U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington

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FORTRESS CUBA

Address by Senator Henry M. Jackson

Senate Floor, Tuesday, September 11, 1979

Mr. President, I believe that the American people owe a debt of gratitude to our colleague from the State of Florida, Senator Richard Stone, for his tenacious efforts to bring to the attention of the nation the fact that the Soviet Union once again has exploited the trust of the American people. As he warned us, and as we now know, the Soviets have deployed an integrated combat force -- a "brigade" -- to Cuba. This force is in addition to the 1500 to 2000 Soviet military advisors deployed there. It is now quite clear that during the same period that the world saw Soviet forces deployed to Angola, naval forces and command headquarters personnel deployed to Ethiopia, ground and air personnel and equipment deployed to Afghanistan, and naval forces deployed to South Yemen and Vietnam, the Soviets were deploying combat ground forces and their weapon systems to an island just off our coast. At the same time, the Cuban proxies of the Soviet Union have been involved in conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and in Central America.

Mr. President, this deployment of Soviet combat forces in Cuba

is not an isolated event: it is a most dramatic example of a pattern

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Soviet and Cuban behavior which is hostile to the interests of the United States, its friends and allies. Other things have been going on with which we should be equally concerned. We have seen Soviet airlift and sealift assets transport Cuban fighting personnel to distant conflicts. We have also seen Soviet pilots "relieve" Cuban pilots so that they could be free to fight in Ethiopia.

In the last two years, we have begun to see the development of "Fortress Cuba" -- a major upgrading of the combat capabilities of the Cuban armed forces. The military build-up in Cuba of most concern has been a qualitative one, and represents a major change in what the Soviets and the Cubans believe they can get away with in this part of the world.

MIG-23's have been introduced. One variant of this type of sophisticated aircraft deployed in Cuba is designed for ground attack, and has the necessary range to reach points in the South Eastern United States. Similar aircraft in the Soviet Union are capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

More ominous, during this past year the Soviets have supplied the Cubans with their first attack submarine capability. They have introduced two boats: one is a training unit, the other is a combat unit. Cuba has no experience in submarine warfare. Are the officers who will call the shots on Cuban attack submarines Cuban or Soviet? What is the role of any Soviet naval advisors embarked? This is a brand new military capability for Cuba. And it would seem likely that the Soviets would provide a separate training submarine only if they ended to supply Cuba with a number of attack boats. Diesel submarines are very quiet when operating on batteries; the type of submarine supplied -- known as a FOXTROT -- is an ocean going combatant;

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~~and~~ boats of this type are capable of laying mines covertly off our coast. In numbers, they would constitute a major threat to our oil supplies. Even a small number are especially well suited for covert insertion of personnel and small arms throughout the Caribbean and Central America.

Mr. President, not far from Cuba are two U.S. ballistic missile submarine bases, and many of our important sea lines of communications pass near Cuba. The relevant question is how many submarines will the Cubans have to have before we are required to allocate a portion of our shrinking navy to deal with these submarines at the onset of a major war -- or in times of heightened tension?

Certainly, one or two submarines or a dozen or so MIG-23's do not constitute an overwhelming threat to the United States in and of themselves. The point is that this is a beginning. Where should we draw the line? To what degree can we tolerate a hostile power in the Caribbean which can pose a major threat to our Central American and Caribbean allies, and something of a threat to us? How big a "Fortress Cuba" is too big? The Cubans, clearly with the support of the Soviets, today feel free to involve themselves in hostilities throughout the world. More important, the Cubans and the Soviets would appear to believe that there is little or no risk of adverse U.S. response to Cuban involvement in the internal affairs of Central American and Caribbean countries.

The military balance today is very different from that which existed in 1961. We have allowed ourselves to drift into a position where the Soviets believe that they can do most anything they and their Cuban surrogates wish to do -- even in this hemisphere. We are now witnessing just one of the effects of the unparalleled Soviet military

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that this accumulation of conventional and nuclear strength will lead

the Soviets to become more bold and more confident that their freedom of action increasingly is becoming less constrained. In Africa, in the Middle East, in the Indian Ocean area, in the Far East, and in the Caribbean, the Soviets are asserting themselves. They are exploiting their military capabilities for political advantage.

Mr. President, we can no longer delay in re-examining, in taking a fresh look at what the Soviets are up to in the world. And, Mr. President, the time for the United States to reaffirm its position on what Soviet behavior we will not tolerate in this hemisphere is now. As a beginning, we must insist on no less than the following:

- One, Soviet combat units must be removed from Cuba.
- Two, Soviet high performance ground attack aircraft must be removed from Cuba.
- And, three, under no circumstances should the Soviet Union be allowed to provide Cuba with additional submarines, or other naval forces with the reach to threaten our ports or our shipping.

The military balance has shifted adversely over the last decade and a half, and we must take actions to redress this shift. Fortunately, the United States still possesses political strength and considerable military power. What is needed now is a national consensus behind our determination that we will not allow the Soviets to turn Cuba into a fortress-state capable of threatening the U.S., our allies and friends in this hemisphere, and our vital lines of communication.